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ABSTRACT

Since there is no private property in the Soviet Union, social status is largely determined by education. Consequently, the educational levels of rural youth in all the Union Republics are nearly identical, while among the older generations of rural inhabitants there are still definite differences. In Estonia, for example, the educational level of the senior rural inhabitant is twice as high as it is in Uzbekistan, while among the rural youth of these two Union Republics, the educational level is virtually equal. Differences in the educational levels of men and women are also disappearing. Higher educational standards are related to changes in the occupational structure of the nation as exemplified by the fact that among Uzbeks aged 50-59, not more than one-tenth are employed in skilled jobs while among Russians and Estonians, the percentage is one-third and one-half respectively. Yet the majority of the rural youth in each nation is employed in skilled jobs. Young people of various nationalities have almost identical concepts of the "good life", citing the family, interesting jobs, and material well-being as primary prerequisites. The Russian language is becoming the common language of all nations, but the main language of each nationality is also preserved to assure specific national expression. National specificity is particularly manifest in the authority of the family, and surveys indicate 80% of the young Uzbeks condemn divorce and resist urban migration. (JC)

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OF IV WORLD CONGRESS OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY

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# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RURAL YOUTH IN THE NATIONAL REGIONS OF THE USSR: GENERAL AND SPECIFIC FEATURES

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# The Integrated Development of Human and Natural Resources: The Contribution of Rural Sociology

Seminar 15: Rural Youth: Human Resource or Human Burden?

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# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RURAL YOUTH IN THE NATIONAL REGIONS OF THE USSR: GENERAL AND SPECIFIC FEATURES

(Material to IV World Congress of Rural Sociology)

Moscow, 1976.

There are different approaches in the study of youth problems. Usually an analysis of the younger generation is an end in itself, which is quite justified, for youth problems are acute and meaningful from all aspects. But there can also be a somewhat different approach when the study is not confined to purely "youth" framework, i.e., when it deals not with specifically "youth" problems, but with general social processes, devoting special attention to their specific manifestation among the younger generation. Youth may be likened to "Window" through which one can observe general human phenomena and assess their stability and, above all, their prospects. This approach presupposes the use of special methods for the comparative study of the younger and older generations and the need to reveal the mechanism of the transfer from generation to generation of social parameters showing the direction of social chanches - the affirmation, disappearance or development of specific social and ethnic features.

The Soviet Union offers a particularly rich, vast and informative experimental field for such studies. History itself may be said to have staged a grand experiment in the interaction of socio-ethnic regions that were rather heterogeneous in the recent past. Soviet power was established in a country of deep contrasts and great variety of socio-ethnic formations. Capitalist relations prevailed in the

country, counteracting with feudal and patriarchal relations in various regions, notably in the Asian outlying areas. Intellectual culture was different too, due to a certain extent to the impact of religion, with its different and often antagonistic denominations (Muslim, Christian, etc.).

Soviet power proclaimed equality of nations, but this juridical right was separated from actual equality by an inevitable historical period marked by deep-going social processes.

These processes had their specific features in rural localities. In contrast to towns with their mixed national population, where people of different nationalities come in direct contact with one another, work and rest together, villages have a predominantly uni-national population, direct contacts between nations are limited and the older generations play a comparatively great role in the conservation of norms and customs. The village is a permanent source of reproduction of traditional national specific features, offering a relatively fertile soil for their preservation and manifestation in culture and everyday life. And though this ethnic specificity of culture is not confined to the countryside and is even spread through modern mass information channels, i.e., actually by the intelligentsia, still it is precisely the countryside that is the permanent source for such reproduction and manifestations. From this standpoint the processes of the internalisation of the culture of

the rural population, specifically the rural youth, are of special interest, for if internationalisation gains ground even here, it means that these processes reach deep inside the ethnic organism.

For the purposes of a comparative study of the rural youth use may be made of different sources: historical and other actual records, from statistical information to fiction, and, on the other hand, people themselves, their perception of the reality, destinies, concrete behaviour, mutual relations. The means of study are observations and polls, interviews and questionnaire polling which at times lay claim, not without grounds, to being representative of whole nations.[I] relying on these sources, let us try to characterise the main parameters and general trends of the social and cultural development of rural youth in various

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I) A study of this tipe was carried out by the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences according to a summary programme in a number of Soviet republics, representatively for the population of each republic as a whole and for nations inhabiting republics. (For more details about the study, its programme; sampling and experimental results, see "Sovetskaya etnografiya", No. 3, 1972 and No.4, 1973 and "Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya", No. 2, 1974).

ethnic regions of the Soviet Union. To get an idea of the specific features of youth, it is necessary to carry out a comparative inter-generation investigation. This investigation is in two directions: "vertically", when young generations (below 29 years of age) are compared with the adult generations (30-49 years) and the older generation (50 years and over), and "horizontally", when comparisons are made betweenyouth contingents of various republics of the Soviet Union.

First of all, let us dwell on objective criteria which not just reflect but in many ways determine the culture and life of nations. These criteria are education, trades and occupations. There are very noticeable variations from generation to generation, which are especially graphically reflected in the growth of education which very sensitively records the process of the development and coming together of nations.

In the Soviet Union where there is no private property and where the social status is largely determined by education, the popularity and prestige of education are quite noticeable and are easy to explain. It is no accident that educational levels of rural youth in all Union Republics are practically fully identical, where as among the middle and, even more so, among older generations of rural inhabitants there are still definite differences in this respect, from one republic to another. In Estonia the educational level of

the senior rural inhabitants is twice as high as in Uzbekistan and among rural youth of these two Union Republics this indicator is almost equal - eight classes of secondary school on the average among the Estonians and Uzbeks (according to the 1970 census). It is significant that this educational level (eight classes) has been recorded by the census among the youth of basic nationalities in all Union Republics.

Simultaneously, differences are gradually disappearing in the educational levels of men and women, which is an active expression of the current process of emancipation. While in the oldest age group recorded by the cesus (60 years and over) men are more educated than women in the case of all nationalities, in the middle-age and, still more so, junior age groups men and women have fully identical levels of education or else women are ahead of men in this respect. In the Russian Federation, Estonia and Latvia this has come about earlier than in other republics, in the middle age generation (30-49 years). The more rapid growth of the educational standarts of women is now a distinctive feature in all ethnic regions of the country.

Naturally, the higher educational standarts are organically connected with chanches in the occupational structure of nations. In this respect the older generations display marked differences between nations. Thus, among Uzbeks aged 50-59 years not more than one-tenth are employed in skilled

jobs (mental or physical), among the Russians the proportion is one-third and among the Estonians one half.

This occupational differential among nations has been considerably overcome in the case of the younger generation. The bulk of rural youth in each nation is employed on skilled jobs: more than a half of young Uzbeks, almost two-thirds among the Russians and about three quarters among Estonians. The few differences in this respect between nations are due chiefly to women who, burdened with big families as, for example, in Uzbekistan, are naturally more than, say, Russian or Estonian women oriented on the family and household work, even though they have education. Some occupations and trades requiring not only relatively high skills but also greater expenditure of labour, more active "inclusion" into production, such as the work of agricultural team heads, zootechnicians, veterenarians, technicians and agronomists, are still staffed mainly with men in Uzbekistan, where as in most of the other republics, especially in Estonia (where women have two or three times fewer children than in Uzbekistan), they have long lost this specific character. According to the census data, only 3 per cent of work team heads in Uzbekistan were women in 1959 and 7 per cent in 1970; in Estonia the figures were 30 and 61 per cent respectively. The proportion of women among agronomists, zootechnicians, veterenary surgeons, technicians and feldshers in Uzbekistan constitutes about 15 per cent, in Georgia and Moldavia about

one-quarter, in the Russian Federation about one-third and even one half in some trades and in Estonia it is considerably more than a half. These figures are correlated to the size of families and the number of children. In the republics where large families predominate, there is bound to appear a certain "division" of labour and functions in production work and in the family after the arrival of children. It is not accidental that before marriage, in a comparatively young age, these differences between men and women are absent, which is expressively reflected in the equal level of their education.

The socio-cultural identification (community) of young generations of Soviet nations fosters the development and deep affirmation of common social values. During mass polling the rural youth of various republics, just as the older generation, referred to ideological education and the strengthening of the country's defence might as problems of primary importance.

Young people of various nationalities have almost identical concepts of "good life". In every poll they referred to the family, interesting job and material well-being as the decisive conditions of "good life". It is noteworthy that the prestige of interesting jobs increased down the scale of generations: the younger the generation, the higher is the value of an interesting job. In the oldest generation of rural inhabitants (50 years of age and older) of each na-

tion work comes second after the family in the system of values, for the younger generation (of Russians and Estonians) aninteresting job is rated practically as highly as the family and among Uzbeks the prestige of the family is higher, though not to such an extent as in the case of the older generation.

On the whole, though there are definite variations between nations in the very structure of the concept of "good life", their concepts are essentially identical, which testifies to the similarity of the basic parameters of social mentality and to the affirmation of fundamentally identical moral norms among rural youth of various nationalities. An overall indicator of this is to a certain extent the mass attraction of youth to the Komsomol organisation. In villages of every Soviet republic a rather considerable part of young people of 18-20 years of age are YCL'ers.

Naturally, simultaneously with this full equality is affirmed among rural young generations in relation to the consumption of cultural information. The measure of its intensity, in particular the consumption of artistic cultural products, growing from generation to generation, is practically identical among youth of various nationalities. While in the older generations there are notable differences between nations, in the younger generations they have already been obliterated, which once again indicates the intensity of the processes of the social and cultural approximation of

ethnic communities. For example, among Uzbeks of the older generation in the countryside there are far less steady readers of fiction than among Estonians (from 3 to II per cent Uzbeks, depending on the occupational group, against 23-27 per cent Estonians), while among young people their proportion is the same among Uzbeks and Estonians - one-third. The same trend is observed in other fields of culture. Only I4 per cent of Uzbeks over 60 years of age are theatre-goers, against 49 per cent of Estonians, whereas among young people theatre-goers constitute the overwhelming majority of Uzbeks (almost two-thirds) and Estonians (about 90 per cent). Newspapers, radio and television are essentially equally spread among all nationalities. In this respect there are practically no differences between nations among both younger and older generations. In Uzbekistan about 60 per cent of rural inhabitants of the older generation view TV programmes and in Estonia about 70 per cent, while the proportion of TV viewers among young people fully coincides, constituting 80 per cent.

It is important to stress, however, that the fundamental similarity of cultural pursuits of rural youth in different ethnic regions does not cancel national variety which is stably manifested in cultural life. It is expressed most clearly in the national forms of culture which are largely rooted in the countryside. With the extension of cultural information and the broadening of general intellectual

horizons, the rural population retains its orientation to the national forms of culture, which is clearly manifested, in particular, in folk art, music, language, etc. While the national forms of culture continue to dominate, the relationship between folk art and professional art is gradually changing in favour of the latter. But this process is developing with different intensity from republic to republic which is evidently conditioned by the specific features of folk art explaining its different amenability to modernisation which follows primarily the European patterns. While in the older generations rural inhabitants of different nationalities are more or less equally oriented to the national forms of art of their nationality, in the younger generations the relationship between traditional folk art and modern professional art varies, depending on the extent of the "Europeanisation" of the culture of the given ethnos. Thus, the older generations of Uzbeks, Russians and Estonians are almost fully oriented to the traditional folk music and dances. Folk musicin the countryside is preferred by 72 per cent of Estonians aged 60 years and over, 83 per cent of Russians and 93 per cent of Uzbeks; folk dances of the given nationality are preferred by about 80 par cent of Russians and Estonians and 92 per cent of Uzbeks, but among younger generations the orientation to folk music and dances declines among all nationalities, though to a different extent. Among Estonians only a very small proportion of rural inhabitants

retain interest in folk music (10-15 per cent) and dances (up to 20 per cent); among Russians the proportion is about one half, but among Uzbeks with their "Asian specificity" of folk art the overwhelming majority are still oriented to folk music and dances (85-89 per cent). Accordingly, more interest is shown in professional forms of art, both national and international, though to a different extent: most palpably among Estonians, to a smaller extent among Russians and still less so among Uzbeks. Thus, on the whole, we can speak of the expansion of the cultural gamut of nations. This is clearly expressed in ethnic-linguistic processes. The Russian language is becoming the language of communication between the nations of the whole country. Young people know it far better than people of the older generation. While the older generations of rural inhabitants in some national regions, e.g., Uzbekistan and Estonia, in their overwhelming majority (60-75 per cent) practically do not know the Russian language (do not speak Russian or speak it with great difficulties), the younger contingents (two-thirds up to four quarters) know the Russian language or, at least, can use it. Of course, the main language of each nationality is the native language whose vocabulary is developing, expanding and growing more perfect. The assimilation of the Russian language promotes a certain internationalisation of cultural forms, making easier the assimilation of the culture of other nations and contacts between ethnic groups and in-

tensifying the social mobility of the population.

To be sure, the internationalisation of culture, both its linguistic forms and, still more so, its substance, in no way cancels the specific national expression of culture in various spheres of life.

The national peculiarity is manifested even in production culture. Concrete investigations show that among Uzbeks or Tatars the popularity of agrarian labour and, accordingly, "agrarian" professional interests is higher than among the Russians, even those of them who are resident in the same republics - Uzbekistan and the Tatar Autonomous Republic.

National specifity is still more striking in the intimate family everyday life. The authority of the family is high everywhere, but its traditional value and prestige are especially stable among Uzbek young people. It is not accidental that almo t all young people (over 80 per cent) of the Uzbek countryside, just as the older generation, rule out any justification of divorces. The differences in the evaluation of this are very insignificant from generation to generation. The situation is different in Estonia and the Russian Federation. There are very big differentials in the attitudes of the younger and older generations. Russians and Estonians of the older generation, just as Uzbeks, rule out divorces, while about half of young people of these nationalities do not hold the view that the family must be preserved at any cost. Various family attitudes among generations are

reflected not only in attitudes to marriage relations, but also in relations between generations, between parents and children. For example, all young people of the Uzbek countryside held it absolutely obligatory for them to seek the consent of their parents to their marriage. In the villages of the Russian Federation only one-third of young rural inhabitants hold this view.

The variety of attitudes, naturally, tells on the real behaviour of young people. This is most clearly expressed in the processes of migration. Young people of the Uzbek countryside, just as their counterparts in the Russian Federation, are well acquainted with urban life, and the intensity of daily contacts with the town, as demonstrated by concrete investigations, is not lower than in the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, due a multitude of reasons and, in particular, the closeness of family ties in the countryside, the specific features of culture, the young people of Uzbekistan have much stronger ties with the rural environment. If, for example, about one-third of young people of the Saratov region (the typical Russian region) would like to move to town, in Uzbekistan the proportion is only 8 per cent. Almost one-third of young people in the Saratov region plan to move to town within two years and in Uzbekistan the proportion is about 2 per cent. The actual rural-urban migration from the villages of the European part of the USSR constitutes about 5-6 per cent of the population every two years and in Uzbe-

kistan it does not exceed I per cent.[I)]

Thus, in the context of vigorous unification of socio--economic conditions in various regions of the country and the community of the socio-cultural life of youth, its national contingents still retain their specific features. This is reflected in the daily behaviour and speaks of the variety and richness of real life, of the community and specificity of interests. In the course of time the integration of national contingents of rural young people intensifies, but this does not affect the wealth of the national identity of the cultural life of peoples.

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I) Коммунистическое воспитание тружеников и вопросы повышения культуры сельского быта. М.,1975, с.146.

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